

Ergonomics

You've probably heard the word "ergonomics." Ergonomics is all about a "good fit" – how you fit with your tools and work environment for safety, health, productivity and comfort.

The whole idea of ergonomics is to design your tools, workstation and work routine so you can work at your best. With ergonomics, you can reduce your chances of accident or injury. You can also be more productive when you're more comfortable.

A common type of workplace injury resulting when ergonomics is not applied is repetitive strain injury. The best known of these conditions is Carpal Tunnel Syndrome. Arms, hands and fingers become disabled from continual, prolonged, repetitive motion.

Pay attention to how you feel while you're working. Are your eyes strained? Does your back hurt? What's causing it? Maybe it's time to make some changes.

Start by looking at your workstation. Is your chair the right height with enough back support? Is your desk or worktable at the right level to prevent arm strain? How's your posture? You can also improve your lighting or change the distance or intensity of a computer screen to prevent eye fatigue.

If you have to reach for tools and other materials, you can arrange them so **you can reach** them without having to stretch, bend or twist. Use proper lifting **techniques** when you must pick up an object, so you don't injure your back. If you must store materials, put them on a shelf rather than on the floor, so you don't have to bend down.

Tools can cause physical workplace problems. Tools are not always designed for comfort. You may have to twist yourself into an odd position to use an improperly designed tool. Some handles cut into the hand. Other tools are exceptionally prone to vibration, which is a contributor to repetitive strain injuries.

It is a good idea to learn about ergonomics and apply it to make your work easier. Try to obtain ergonomically-designed tools and workstation aids if possible. Do what you can to adapt your workstations to your own unique needs. Change your physical movement habits and vary your work routine to avoid straining or repetitive situations.

ERGONOMICS What is it?

Ergonomics is the study of adapting equipment, procedures and surroundings to the individual. Ergonomics takes into account limitations of the human body in a work situation, and the differences in size, shape and ability among different people.

WHAT YOU CAN DO:

Take an "ergonomic" tour of your work area. Consider what you can re-arrange to prevent problems such as muscle strain and harmful repetitive motions.

Adjust your workstation for a better fit. This could mean raising your chair, lowering your work bench or obtaining a foot rest. You might be able to rearrange the lighting or set your work surface at a better angle.

Adapt your tools. Use tools that are designed to keep your hands,

arms and back in a comfortable, natural position while you work. Use tools with longer, padded handles, or which are angled to reduce strain and vibration.

Arrange your area for the way you work. Lay out tools and materials where you can reach them without excessive stretching, bending or twisting of your body. Store materials on shelves at a comfortable height so you don't have to do as much lifting.



DID YOU KNOW?

One simple ergonomic principle you can apply is to vary your work tasks. Switch from one job to another. This helps you avoid strain from being in one position for a long time or performing the same repetitive task. Be sure to take your scheduled breaks.

FACT or FICTION?

FICTION: Use of ergonomics is for experts only.

Making ergonomic improvements always requires special measuring tools, formulas and high-priced special equipment.

FACT: You're an ergonomics expert.

Sure, your employer relies on the resources of experts to design tools, machinery and workstations that are safe and comfortable to use. But you may also be able to do quite a bit yourself to improve your work area and tools even more. Only you know what is comfortable or not when you do your work. You should pay attention to how you feel when you are working. Think of how you can improve your workstation so that you can work more comfortably and safely.